

CHAPTER 9 LUSOPHONY AND THE FIELD OF WORLD KNOWLEDGE

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It has become a commonplace to say that relations in the lusophone world are above all "rhetorical", and do not amount to very much in practice. But given that lusophony is a universe of language, the fact of its being rhetorical is not necessarily to be seen as bad, or as being incompatible with the achievement of some results in practice. What is open to question is the extent to which, even at the rhetorical level, we have been effective. Not long ago a Portuguese colleague confessed to me that she had enormous difficulty in concentrating on, and in taking seriously, the presentations given by Brazilian colleagues during the Luso-Afro-Brazilian congress in Lisbon in 1994. Listening to them she had the impression of watching unreal characters from Brazilian soap operas. I should add incidentally that my astonishment at her remarks was two-fold. I not only had the sensation of that my natural, casual self was somehow being violently disturbed, but this was also happening to me by way of a representative of that group of people whose "real" speech, and in an almost mirror-image of the Portuguese, gets confused with the speech of the characters in our jokes.

Of course we all know how to play the game of political correctness and hide these issues. But in my view I do not think that this attitude is one which is compatible with the ethos of those who would claim to be social scientists. So I think it is healthy to state at the outset that before it even becomes an issue in the field of world knowledge, lusophony is above all an issue amongst ourselves. This may in itself give us a starting point for discussion of our subject. But for this purpose, given that identities are clearly constructs, I suggest it is first of all necessary to state that lusophony is practically non-existent today as an element in the field of world knowledge. What then are the possible conditions under which it may come to exist in the future - or, to borrow an expression from Arjun Appadurai (1991) - how is it possible to create as a real structure this *locality* (or "local-ness") - which is distinct from physical or spatial proximity? The fact is that we are trying to unite around a "non-object", and this in itself must have some significance. In this context, we should perhaps take into account the global production of differences, which is in itself particular and paradoxical.

There is certainly no shortage of differences *between* us. For example, those which arise as a result of centrifugal forces which are taking us in certain directions, dictated by current geopolitics, such as those of the European Community and of Mercosur. Or those which, I presume, exist as a result of the strong magnetic attraction of South Africa in the African continent. In Brazil's case, the strengthening of relations with Argentina is a relevant issue. Argentina seems fated to share with us in the New World the duplication of many of the ambiguities and ambivalence experienced by our former metropolitan powers - even if sometimes the negative and positive poles of those ambiguities have been switched. Just as in the family, close proximity can breed opposing feelings. However, certain initiatives, which carry a reasonable weight of political will behind them, are beginning to take hold even in our own area of academic work. In May of this year (1997) we had a meeting in Rio de Janeiro to discuss forms of integration between PhDs in the Social Sciences within the framework of Mercosur. The number of Argentinians in our postgraduate courses is growing, and Argentinian and Uruguayan lecturers and researchers are taking on important institutional roles. In September there was a large regional gathering of anthropologists in Uruguay. And at least one scientific organisation of a regional nature has already been formed: the Mercosur Association of Social Scientists of Religion. All this has occurred within the space of a few years.

A reasonable case can be made for the argument that such differences and identities only truly "stick" nowadays if they are not only recognised, but are in fact stimulated at a global level. This goes against the conventional wisdom which states that globalisation necessarily leads to homogenisation. There are certain indicators that there is some interest in pursuing this path, obviously within a generic overall framework which is indeed a common one, and this very conference, organised by the International Sociological Association, may well be a symptom of that interest. I recall that some fifteen years ago I wrote an article in a special issue of the Swedish periodical magazine *Ethos* on *The Shaping of National Anthropologies*, to which George Stocking of Harvard University was invited to write a general commentary. In that commentary he wrote:

"Indeed, on the basis of what is presented here, anthropology at the periphery seems neither so nationally varied nor so sharply divergent from that of the center as the conception of 'the shaping of national anthropologies' might have implied. ... On the other hand, one might also suggest that the nation is not the level on which a significant differentiation is most likely to be manifest now or in the future. ... There will be differences in style, focus and problem orientation depending on the specific history of intellectual influences, the academic and ethnographic settings, the context of political and social concern, and the resources available to sustain diversity. While these may be manifest occasionally on a national level, the present case

material suggests that more significant contrast may be evident between the types of national anthropologies proposed above, or more generally between the hegemonic traditions of the center and those of the periphery as a group." (Stocking 1982, p.180)

There are two points arising from this passage by Stocking, which I would like to emphasise. The first is that the reference to the relative lack of originality in the anthropology of the periphery is stated not merely as a fact, but almost as a complaint. I have heard this from other First World anthropologists and it contrasts with the enthusiasm of the north-American philosopher Richard Rorty for the Brazilian thinker Mangabeira Unger, far removed in his theories from Rorty's own liberalism.

"We tragic liberals realize wistfully that back in the 1880s we too might have seen illimitable vistas. ... Maybe the Brazilians (or the Tanzanians, *somebody*) will be able to dodge around that barbed wire ... Unger's book offers a wild surmise, a set of concrete suggestions for risky social experiments, and a polemic against those who think the world has grown too old to be saved by such risk-taking. ... He does not make moves in any game we know how to play. His natural audience may lie in the Third World - where his book may someday make possible a new national romance." (Rorty 1991, p. 187)

Rorty, in spite of himself, responds to the supposed romanticism of Unger by creating his own idealised and "romantic" vision of the Third World. In actual fact Unger is read more in the US than in Brazil, and his influence is light years away from creating a new national romance. This in itself is an interesting enigma, and similar cases could be mentioned. But I believe that what we see here is a game of rhetoric, in which what is really happening through Rorty is an appeal for cross-fertilisation with ideas coming from the outside: an appeal to differentiation, to setting up an "other" with whom a dialogue can be started, against the current of global homogenisation which - at a deeper, psycho-analytical level, so to speak, seems to me to be more feared than actually desired. I believe this fear could lead to its exorcism. All this is not a little ironic for us Third World intellectuals, since we tend to think that the more cosmopolitan we are, the more *acceptance* we will find amongst the scholars of the international academic community. Who knows, perhaps we will have to learn in our professional capacity that which we already practice by means of our traditional hospitality when we receive foreign visitors. We have learned to serve typical, exotic, preferably *piquant* (but not too spicy) Brazilian dishes which we rarely eat ourselves on a day-to-day basis. With this behaviour we confirm our visitors' (and perhaps our own) expectations, by getting closer to our own national culture, which we ourselves want to feel and to transmit. In doing this we suspend temporarily our status as "*estrangeirados*" - those who have adopted foreign customs in their own land (Velho 1995). Actually one of

the issues which usually arouses the curiosity of visitors is the origins of our cuisine and of its condiments and seasonings. This subject serves as an endless source of *philosophical* meanderings which suggest that the metaphorical imagery of the culinary field has a strong influence on the way in which we view the history and dynamics of our own cultures. And depending on how inventive we are this could well lead us in the direction of lusophony.

The second point I would like to stress in relation to Stocking is the idea that the nation is perhaps not the unit which will in the end lead to the formation of an identity. In that particular case what was under discussion was the type of anthropology practised. Although the possibility of a *regional* identity (not necessarily in the geographical sense) has not been raised, there is an opening here through which this possibility could be explored, in the intermediate zone between the nation itself and the *periphery* as a whole. It is in this gap that *lusophony* would possibly be found - something like a third pole, in between universalism and culturalism in the strict sense of the term.

At this point I should like to draw attention to the fact that this production of differences within the global context does not just consolidate or enlarge identities which already exist in some shape or form, but that it may also produce differences *within* the differences. Put in another way, we should follow a path which leads to a deepening of internal divisions. If we take a closer look at unification in the context of Mercosur, we can see that it does not encompass the whole of Brazil in a uniform manner. In the case of Anthropology, there is a clear kind of specialisation in that discipline on the part of anthropologists in the south of the country. This suggests that these identities can be better understood in terms of gradations, rather than in terms of binary opposites. Moreover, they are highly dependent on circumstances: it is as if a kind of *civility* applied to our relationships, making us learn the art of bringing to the forefront of our relations those aspects which bind us closer together, leaving other possibilities to one side, to re-emerge later at the appropriate time. We bring others inside ourselves (Velho 1997) in the juggling acts required by the complexity of our contemporary world. In general terms, it is possible that the idea of *gradations* may acquire increasing influence when thinking about identities, as opposed to the notion of fundamental dichotomies. Taking this one stage further, gradations may be of a fluctuating nature, corresponding to different circumstances and points of view, including specific interests and aspirations.

Perhaps therefore the issue might lie in examining under what conditions our lusophony could be asserted in this type of context. We have already seen a little of what this context suggests: the capacity to live with other *imaginary communities* in a web of multiple identities, and to assert the *global* need for it (i.e. for lusophony). While situated between us - as a *local identity* - and the *global* are our societies and their segments and, last but not least, our governments, who until now have had a vital role to play in the game of

promoting particular strategies and policies. Yet each of these players in turn has had to interpret in their own way the demands of globalisation.

For myself I would not discard the possibility that today, by means of our movement towards civility, it may be at the same time necessary and achievable to reinvent lusophony in the context of a wider and multi-polar (if not a-polar) idea of *iberophony*. This would give to our *imaginary proximity* a truly spatial dimension, without this in any way restricting us to it. Over and above this - and in spite of all the ambiguities involved -, we would thereby be making a frank admission of the presence of strong historical and cultural ties.

Clearly *iberophony* is not an acceptable term in the linguistic sense, but maybe the degree of licence contained in the expression lusophony would allow *iberophony* as well. Might this "iberophony" not be, in our case, the unity which Stocking was seeking, an alternative to the "national" and something that could be asserted globally? In some ways the north-American historian Richard Morse is one step ahead of us with this idea in *Prospero's Mirror* (Morse 1982), where he distances himself from the notion of a generic "latinness". Morse reminds us that, at least as far as Latin America is concerned, such a notion is a French invention. There was a time when, for Brazilians, a *rapprochement* between the Portuguese and the Spanish was seen as a threat to our special relationship. But now that a parallel *rapprochement* is taking place in the New World, and maybe even in the diaspora - where almost unbeknown to us, identities such as the *hispanic* are emerging - perhaps it may finally be possible to put all these individual pieces together. I might even venture to suggest that, in travelling along this difficult path, *offspring* should not only anticipate, but should provoke their *forebears* into adopting less rigid and essentialised attitudes.

It is also important to consider that the "field of world knowledge", which is proposed as part of the equation, is neither stable nor entirely homogenous. Its current condition has to be assessed in the light of what we desire. On this point we could perhaps say, using a phrase which by now we might be able to resurrect with a slight touch of irony, that at a time of crisis there may be some value in the "privileges of underdevelopment." Amongst these "privileges" there was always the need for us to absorb the various schools and areas of thought in the countries of the centre in a much more all-embracing fashion than they themselves do. But today there are additional factors: the fact is that - regardless of personal preferences - we live in a time of a certain perplexity, which tends to subvert the established hierarchies. Recent interest in the *post-colonial* perspective is a good example of this and one which has a close bearing on our own lives. It seems that the global system asks something more of us than mere mimicry.

However, that particular crisis is not happening in isolation - there is a crisis in the institutions of knowledge themselves, above all the universities. And in this aspect perhaps we are facing no more than the old *disadvantages* of underdevelopment, although again with a touch of irony: as soon as we think

we are getting close to the institutions and standards which we use as models, they are, so to speak, no longer there. The building of the nation-state itself, a task to which our social sciences committed themselves either directly or indirectly, is the prime example of this. There is a not insignificant risk that we will fail to learn how to play this game. And then we are also victims of a kind of *fundamentalism of "the other"*. Or, to put it another way, it took us a lot of effort to emulate certain models, so that, like the royalist who is more royalist than the king himself, we become prisoners of shadows. It is a difficult balance, where the very system of which we are a part puts a premium on a certain degree of creativity, but always within a *risk society*. This tests not just our technical competence, but also our political skills. It also tests our emotional skills, which are of necessity engaged when the game of identities is so complex, even if, as part of that new creativity, there is a lighter, more post-modern approach towards them.

In this context we will of necessity have to reassess to what extent it is still current to claim a specific Portuguese cultural identity, both in terms of substance and of strategy. It has become almost second nature for us in Brazil to appeal to such a concept, at least since Gilberto Freyre. There is of course always a risk, as we know, of collapsing into the realm of ideology, as in the case of *lusotropicology*, not to mention committing that almost inevitable new sin recorded by our social sciences, that of *essentialism*. On the other hand it is not entirely clear that we should completely give up that rhetorical concept. Provided that it is taken as such and that its effectiveness in the creation of identity is made clear, and that it is assumed more as a constituent part of civility than as a cultural element in the strong sense of the word. In today's world values such as *syncretism* and *mixing* seem to embody a significant appeal and a significant message. They also have a true political role, in the struggle against fundamentalism. An ideal objective perhaps, for which it would be worth fighting in order to make it universal, would be to combine in the right proportions, on the one hand the capacity to recognise differences - which we get from individualist ideology - with, on the other hand, a capacity to ensure that those differences are not "frozen" or become pathologically essentialist in nature. This ideal would go beyond the legitimate role of essentialism in providing the excluded with a moment of affirmation - a moment when they can force the issue in order to be heard.

Is it possible that, in the extreme case, we lusophones could have a similar function to that which the natives of Samoa, characters in the narrative construct advanced by Margaret Mead, had in the discussion of childhood and youth in the United States? A function as an effect of the *other*, which enables one to reassess oneself? Of course a fictional construct has its limitations, above all the limitations imposed by competing constructs, as is demonstrated by the recent history of Margaret Mead's formulation mentioned above. In the Brazilian case, urban violence has given rise to considerable tension regarding our supposed *cordiality*, particularly - and this is very much in the line of

thought developed here - as far as our *image in the outside world* is concerned. It remains to be seen whether there is a particular way in which we could be part of those global issues. Could it even be said that we have a different way of practising violence, or racial discrimination? Judging by the difficulties we have in applying foreign remedies for these ills, we may venture a cautious *yes* in answer to this question. Clearly this can only be affirmed if we avoid radicalising differences and bear in mind always the ideological risks, insofar as they can be used to deny the existence of conflict. We should also be aware of the points of reference which we choose for the purpose of making comparisons: in the case of Brazil there is a fixation in our minds with making comparisons with the US. But even this is not immutable, and the contribution which lusophony could make if it helped us to get rid of that fixation and to get us used to making richer comparisons, with three or more points of reference - would be a not inconsiderable one.

Once again we seem to be faced with a complex framework which seems to be challenging us directly. If we can demonstrate convincingly how those necessarily relative special characteristics could be conceptualised and understood, and how they could be defined in the realm of the social imagination within the general context in which we live, and furthermore demonstrate the importance of this in today's world, then we will have taken a giant step forward in making a place for lusophony in the field of world knowledge. Clearly such a place could not claim to be exclusivist in nature: it would have as its limits and general frame of reference the game of mirrors of which we are all prisoners and in which we can only move *under the influence* of others, and *having influence on others* (Velho 1997). Last but not least, we should keep in mind always that we are irretrievably immersed in rhetoric.

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